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| PEPP Logo.pngBox 2210Kolonia, Pohnpei 96941Federated States of MicronesiaPEPP.org.fmT: (691) 320-7400; F: (691) 320-4002Toll Free: 1-800-870-0568PEPP.org.fm |

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The idea of founding Partnership for the Environmental Protection of the Pacific came to me over several years of official duty in both the North and South Pacific. I observed first-hand the difficulties encountered by Pacific Island countries and their development partners in addressing the many challenges facing the region. Instead of the tropical idylls of popular imagination, I found that most of the island nations of the Pacific actually suffer great hardships, mainly arising from their physical isolation and remoteness, relative ineconomies of scale, and acute lack of local capacity. They are crippled by high transportation and fuel costs, endemic malnutrition and noncommunicable disease, poor water quality and sanitation, and often overcrowding. "King Tides" from rising seas increasingly threaten their viability. Lack of governance and law enforcement capacity invite exploitation by international organized crime elements. Poachers from distant fishing nations rob them of their sustenance and main revenue source, while putting unremitting, unsustainable pressure on the world's last great tuna fishery.

My personal involvement in leading disaster assistance and humanitarian relief efforts internalized for me the vulnerability of the Pacific Islands. Life-saving maritime search and rescue operations I authorized as acting chief-of-mission underscored the tenuousness of terrestial survival in an overwhemingly marine environment. The numerous environmental and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with which I interacted as Grants Officer never ceased to impress me, but they seemed woefully outmatched by the daunting issues they faced. Government assistance was rarely adequate to the challenge, either. In fact, government involvement sometimes complicated the situation or even exacerbated the underlying problems -- e.g, levying new monitoring and accounting demands on over-stretched staffs or creating a culture of dependence. Well-meaning interagency or whole-of-government approaches simply lacked sustainability and either crashed under their own weight or failed for lack of local buy-in. The paucity of credible, knowledgeable and reliable partners able to use their assistance effectively and responsibly constantly constrained generous regional partners to reluctantly scale back their development efforts. Far from going away, the challenges facing Pacific Island countries were daily becoming more intractable, and my own efforts were only the proverbial drop in the ocean.

I also saw some approaches that were successful. I learned that tenacious and vigorous leadership, combined with a deeply collaborative approach, could spur positive change. I found that experienced people with creative minds could find inventive ways to leverage existing programs and resources in new, more effective ways.  I saw that public-private partnerships, lashing the dynamism of free markets and private enterprise to the policy goals of international development partners and local governments, often stood the best chance of achieving lasting progress.

With a friend of mine -- a successful "red capitalist" entrepreneur from China -- I began to brainstorm about creating an environmental NGO centered on the Pacific. We would be cosmopolitan in our membership but Pacific in our identity. Ours would be a not-for-profit corporation, but we would design our programs and projects so that they would be self-financing, and therefore self-sustaining, whenever possible. We would enlist the leadership of recognized subject-matter experts (SMEs) from around the region. We would focus on good environmental stewardship as a touchstone for better meeting basic human needs, enhancing liveability, building local capacity, increasing sustainable productivity, protecting resources, strengthening sovereignty, promoting community collaboration, and fostering international cooperation. We would strive to become the most reliable partner of choice for international development partners seeking the broadest, fairest, and most effective use of their development assistance in the Pacific.

My friend from China ultimately couldn't join me in this ambitious and charitable enterprise, but several notables could and did. They now serve on our inaugural PEPP Squad or as SMEs in ad hoc advisory committees forming around specific issues. We've room for more.

One of those notables is Dr. Tony Mix. In our first exploratory trip on PEPP's behalf, Tony and I lined up several tens of millions of dollars worth of potential projects and provisional funding pledges. So, PEPP has its work cut out for us, but we've willing partners.

Soon, PEPP's exciting argosy will be underway. I invite you to follow our progress. Better yet, embark with us as a fellow PEPPer. This is your opportunity to become a Founding Member of PEPP.

The poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that a true friend is someone who can make us do what we can. As a true friend of the Pacific, won't you join PEPP in doing what we can? Alone, our efforts are but a drop in the ocean, but combined, we ARE that ocean. Please consider joining us, as yours may be just the drop we're missing.

Sincerely,

Richard K. Pruett

Executive Director